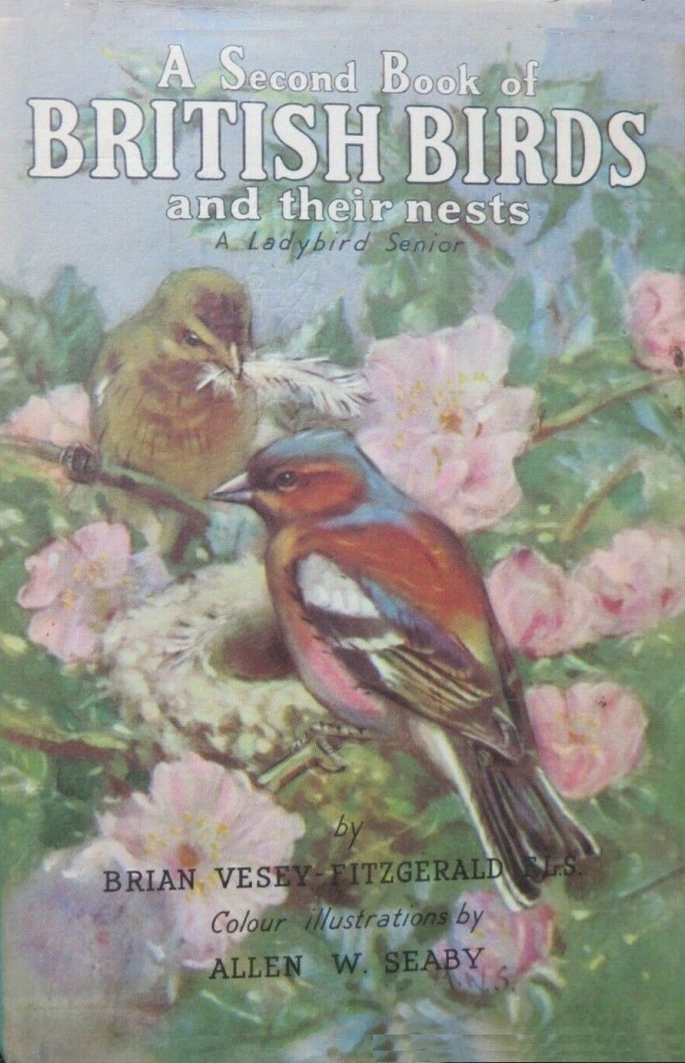


A Second Book of
BRITISH BIRDS
and their nests

A Ladybird Senior



by
BRIAN VESEY-FITZGERALD F.L.S.

Colour illustrations by
ALLEN W. SEABY

Hullo, children! Here is another book about British birds and their nests. I have written this second one because you liked the first book so much, and I hope you will enjoy this one just as well.

Once again, Allen Seaby has given you lovely coloured pictures of the birds I have written about. They are all quite common birds, though you will have to visit the sea-coast to see some of them. I have tried to tell you where to look for each bird, a little about its habits and also its nest.

Looking for nests is great fun. Even if you do not find any—for birds are so clever at hiding their nests—you are almost always sure to find something else very interesting. If you do find the eggs, however, do not take any of them—that is cruel, so just look.

Good looking!

Brian Vaux Fitzgerald.

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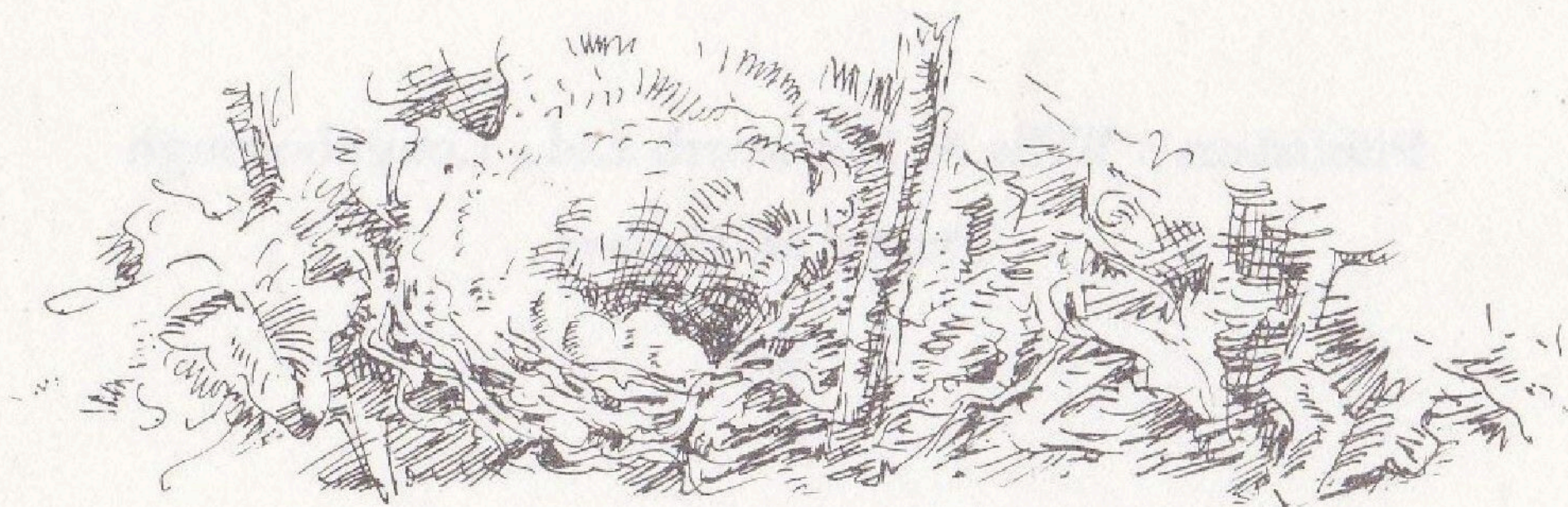
The Hedge Sparrow

The Hedge Sparrow is very common in gardens, but is not seen so easily as some other garden birds because it has no bright colours and, being a shy bird, likes to be hidden.

It feeds on seeds, insects, spiders and worms, spending a lot of time on the ground searching for food among fallen leaves. It does not run, but walks or hops, and never seems to be in a hurry.

Hedge Sparrows are very useful birds in a garden because they eat so many caterpillars.

The nest is built about four feet from the ground in a hedge or thick bush, and there are usually four or five eggs.



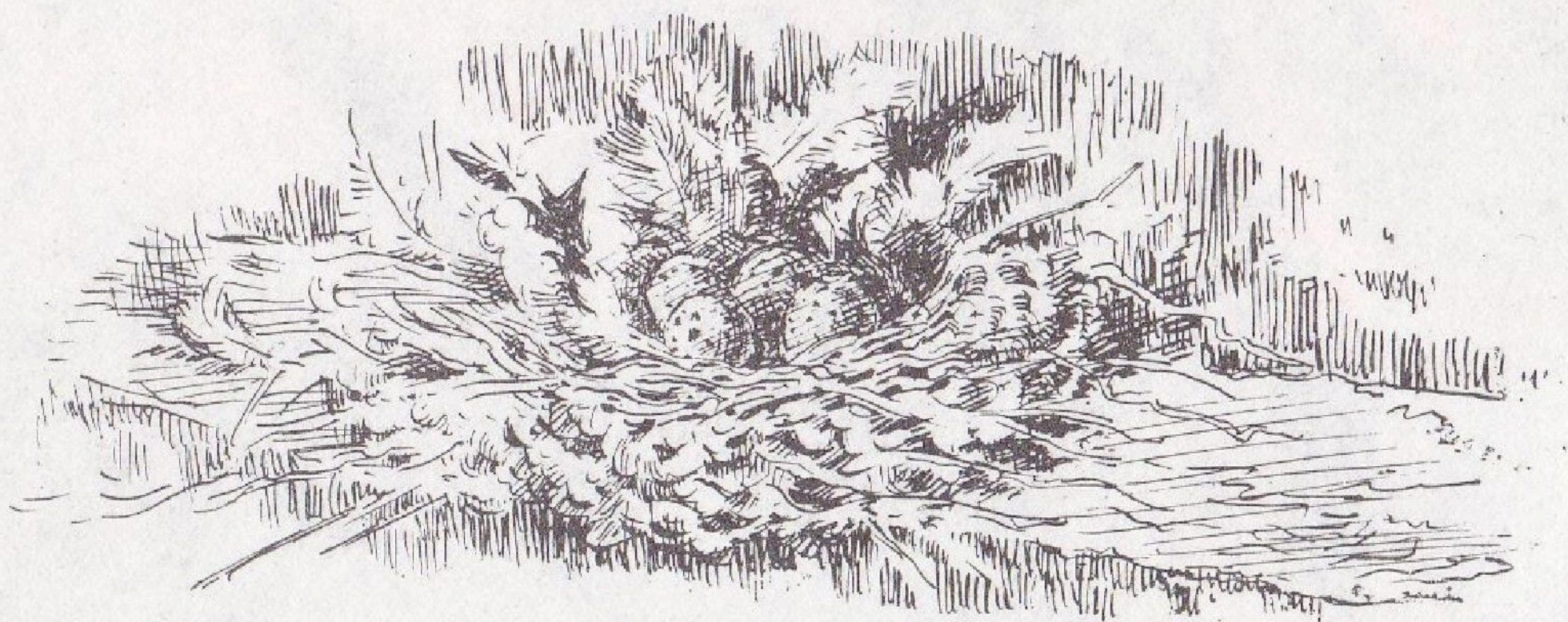


The Swallow

Swallows spend the winter in Africa and come to England for the summer. They arrive at the beginning of April, and in August and September you can see them perching on the telegraph wires preparing for the long journey back.

They nest in colonies inside buildings and particularly like the rafters of barns. Swallows fly almost all day long and catch insects while on the wing; they also drink during flight, sipping up the water as they skim over the surface.

Swallows live only in open country. You never find them in woods and they are never very far away from buildings.





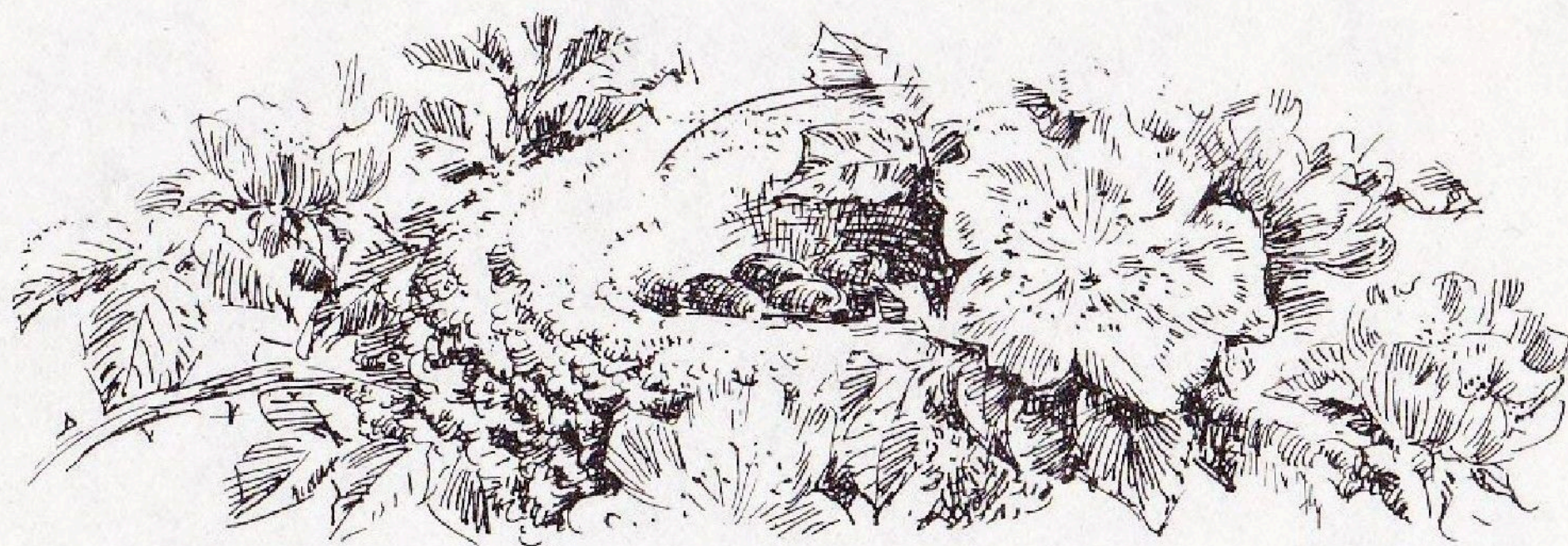
The Chaffinch

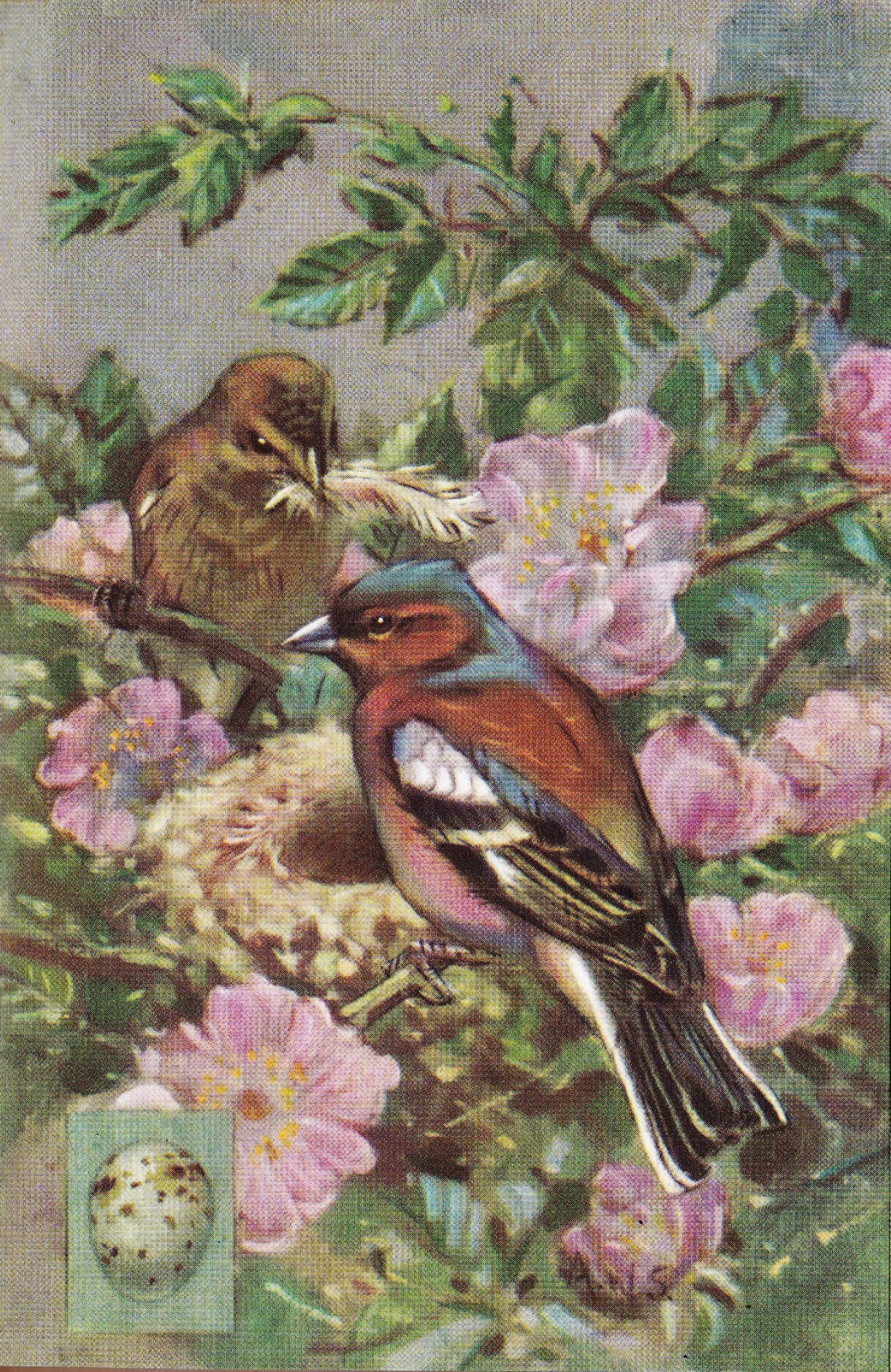
The Chaffinch, about the same size as a House Sparrow, is the bird that calls "*Pink, pink*" almost all day long in the spring, but has a lovely rollicking song as well.

It is a very common bird in England and is as much at home in London as in the open country, being most easily recognised by the white bar on its wings when it flies.

The Chaffinch eats seeds, insects, buds and berries, and sometimes pulls up the crocuses in the garden.

It makes a beautiful nest of moss, wool and grass, lined with feathers and down, which is usually in the fork of a tree or bush never very high from the ground. The eggs are laid in April.





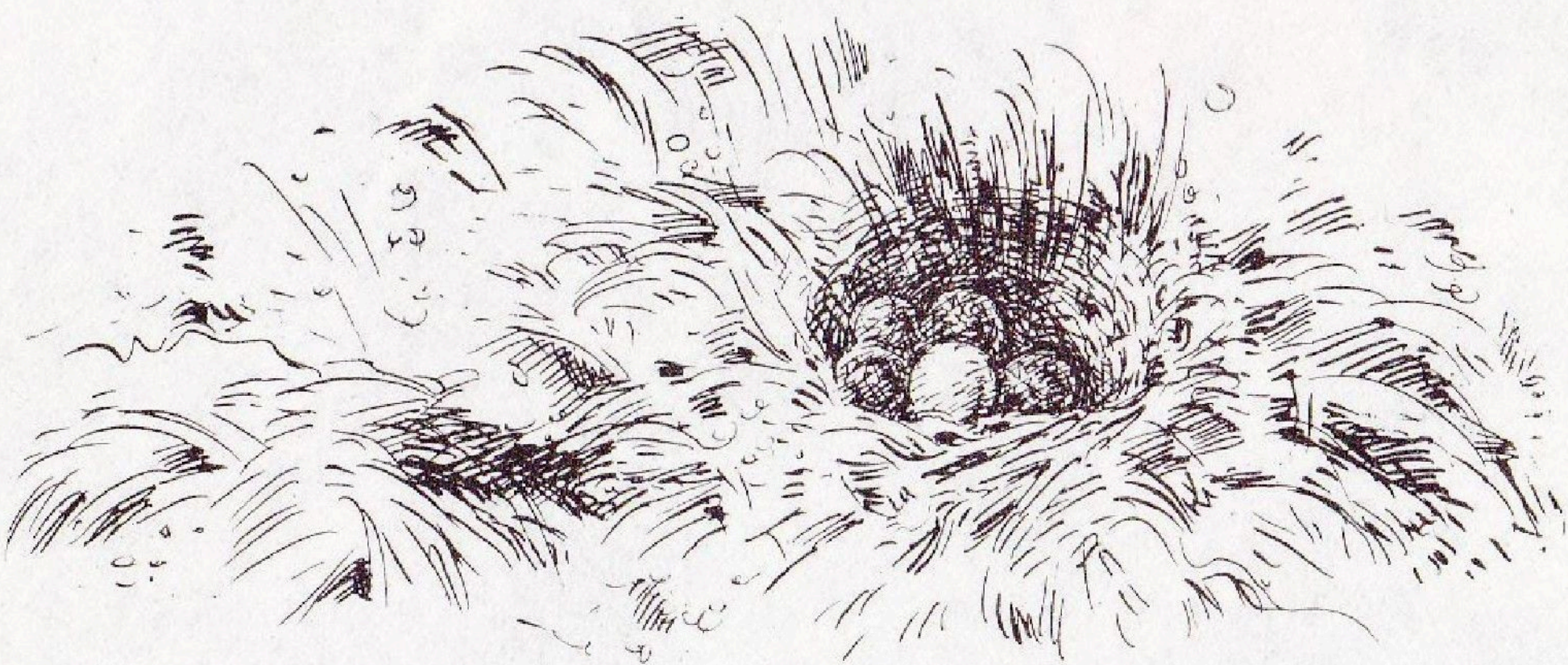
The Cuckoo

The Cuckoo is a large bird with pointed wings and a long tail. Everybody knows its call, but it is only the male bird that says "*Cuckoo*"; the female making a noise like bath-water running out.

The Cuckoo lays its eggs in the nests of other birds, being particularly fond of the nests of Robins, Hedge Sparrows and Meadow Pipits. It takes out one of the eggs already in the nest, lays one of its own in its place, and then eats the egg it has stolen.

Cuckoos come to England for the summer, arriving in April and leaving again in July; the young ones departing about a month later.

They are useful birds because they eat a great many insects and do no harm at all to plants.





The Nightingale

The Nightingale looks like a large, plump brown Robin. It comes to England from over the Mediterranean Sea for the summer, arriving in April and leaving again in August.

Famous for its beautiful song, so strong that it can be heard a long way off, the Nightingale seems to sing all night long in May. It also sings by day, but with so many other birds singing as well, it is not noticed so much.

Nightingales like to build their nests close to paths in woods, spinneys or hedges, and also in gardens; usually on the ground or very close to it, and often in beds of nettles. Even when you know where the bird is, the nest is not easy to find.



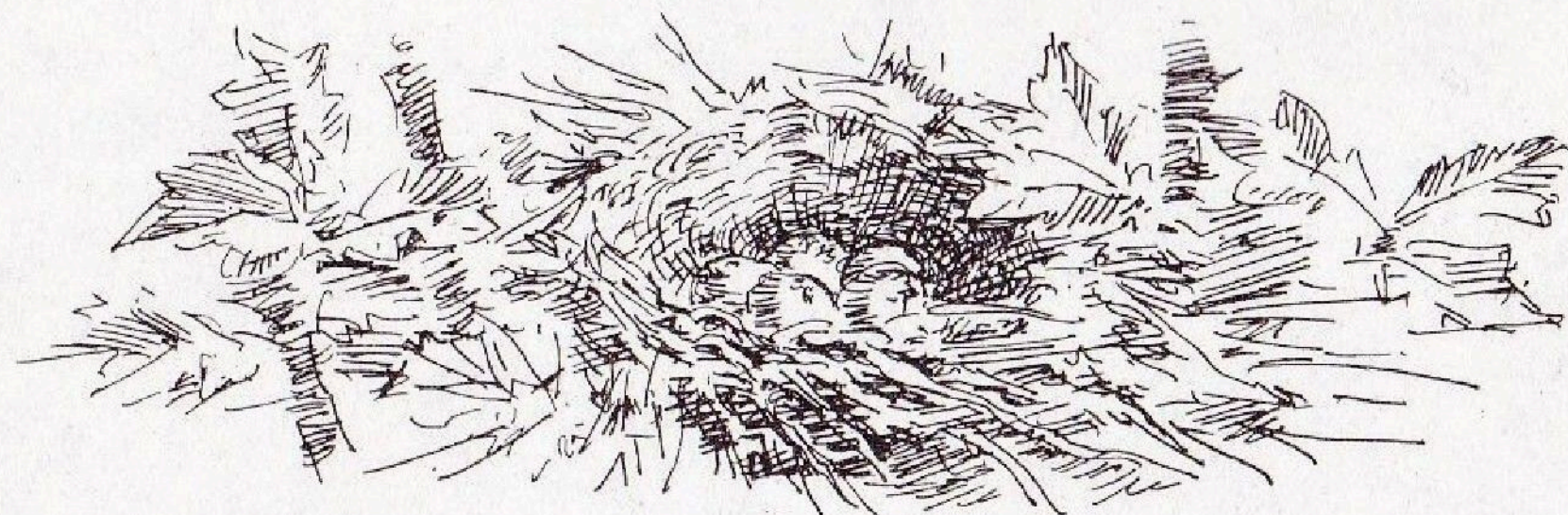


The Greenfinch

The Greenfinch likes gardens and the outskirts of woods, and is about the same size as a Chaffinch, but has a very stout beak. When in flight the wings and tail look yellow, and you generally see several birds together.

Greenfinches eat seeds, berries and the buds of fruit trees, and are also very fond of corn and blackberries.

The nest is built in thick hedgerows or in thorn, holly and gorse bushes, and is sometimes quite high from the ground. It is made of twigs and grasses, lined with hair and roots. The first eggs are usually laid in April, but as some Greenfinches have three families in a summer, you can find eggs until the end of August.





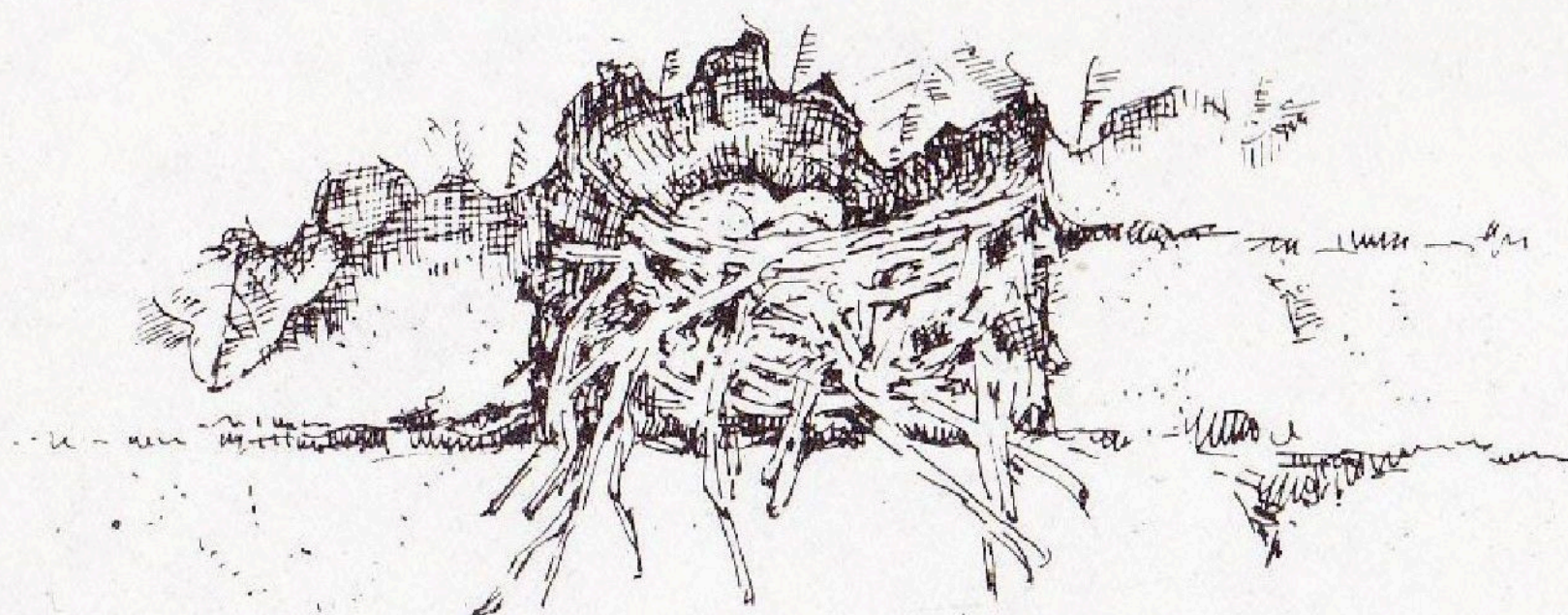
The Jackdaw

The Jackdaw is a cousin of the Rook, but it is much smaller and, as you can see from the picture, has a grey neck.

Jackdaws live in colonies and usually nest in the hole of a tree or building, or even down a rabbit hole. They also like nesting in Church Towers and sometimes build large open nests in trees.

Their food is mostly insects, but they also take the eggs of other birds and will kill young birds, mice and frogs.

Not only are Jackdaws fond of hiding food, they collect bright objects, like pebbles or coins, and hide them too. They are easy to tame and can be taught to talk.





The Great Tit

The Great Tit is very common in gardens and towns and, like the Blue Tit, will eat almost anything. It is the largest of our Tits and is very inclined to bully smaller birds.

Great Tits will come to bird tables and soon get very tame. They will nest in bird boxes nailed to trees, and sometimes in letter boxes of front doors or lamp posts in the streets.

Although the Great Tit does a great deal of harm to spring buds and autumn fruit, it is really a friend to the gardener because it destroys vast numbers of insects throughout the summer.

The Great Tit makes a "*see-saw*" call in the spring which sounds very like a squeaky bicycle pump.





A.W.S.

The Chiffchaff

The Chiffchaff is called a “leaf warbler” because its colouring is so much like a leaf that you can scarcely see it when in a tree. It comes to England for the summer, usually arriving about the middle of March.

You are likely to hear the Chiffchaff before you can see it, for its call, “*Chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff*”, is very easy to recognise, and sometimes it goes on singing this simple little song almost all day long.

The Chiffchaff likes woods and thick shrubberies with plenty of undergrowth, and its nest is round with a hole at the side for a door. This is always placed low down near the ground in thick bushes or brambles.



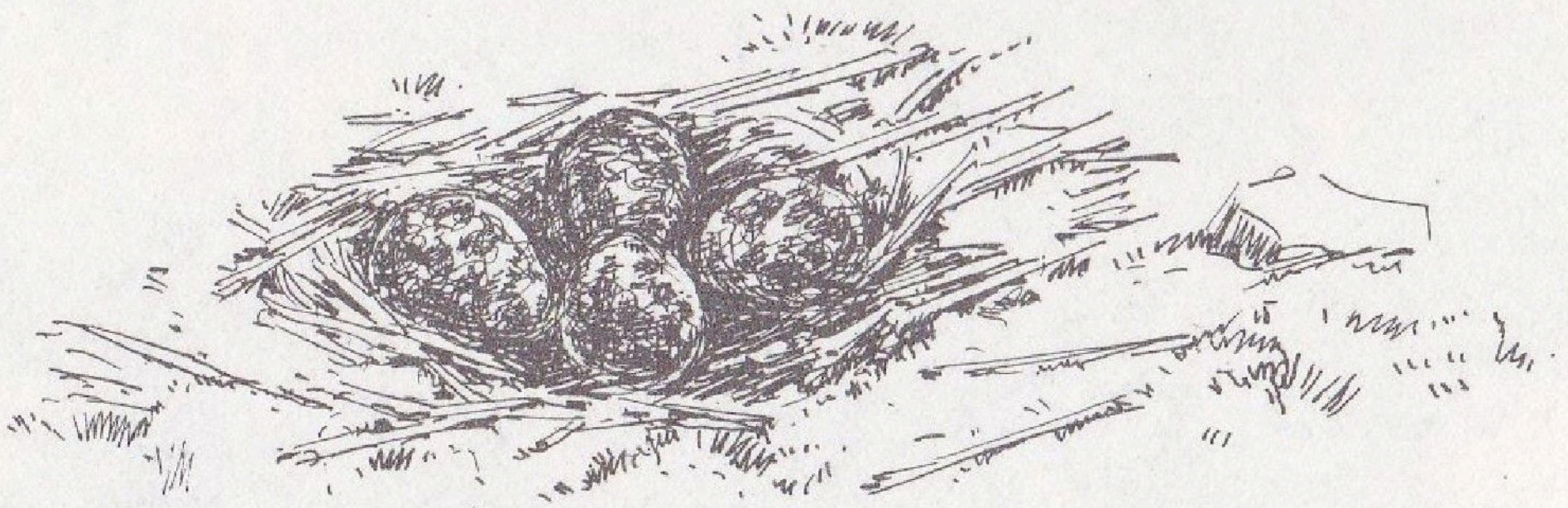


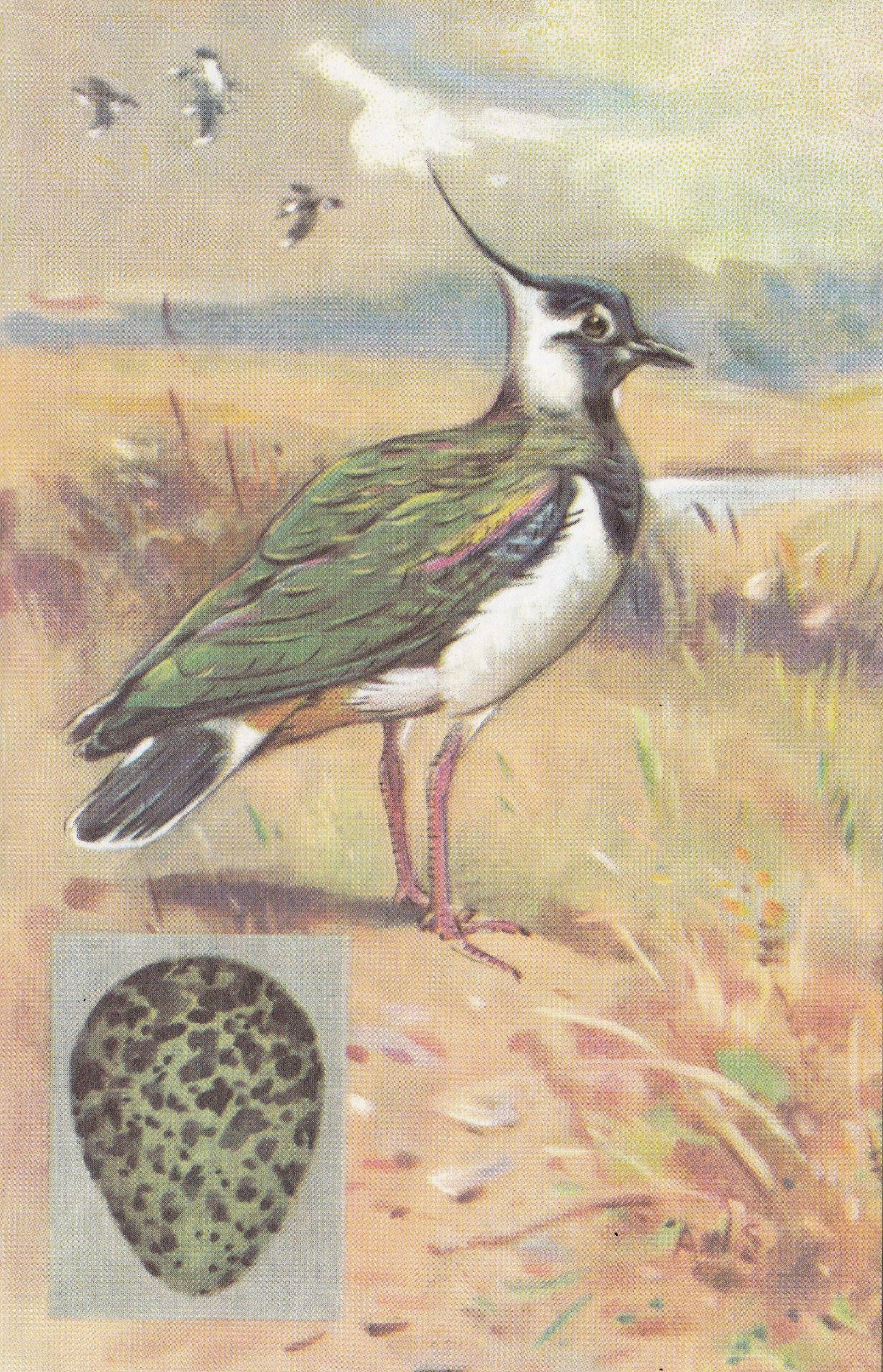
The Lapwing

The Lapwing gets its name from the way it flies, but it is also called the Peewit, because that is exactly the sound it makes. Its proper name, though seldom used, is the Green Plover and it is a very handsome bird indeed.

The Lapwing loves the open country and its nest is always placed in a position commanding a wide view. Actually there is no proper nest, it is just a scrape in the ground in which the eggs are laid, and these being so like the ground are very difficult to find.

In the mating season the Lapwing performs most marvellous aerobatics, taking headlong plunges to earth, then soaring again just when it seems certain it must be dashed to pieces.





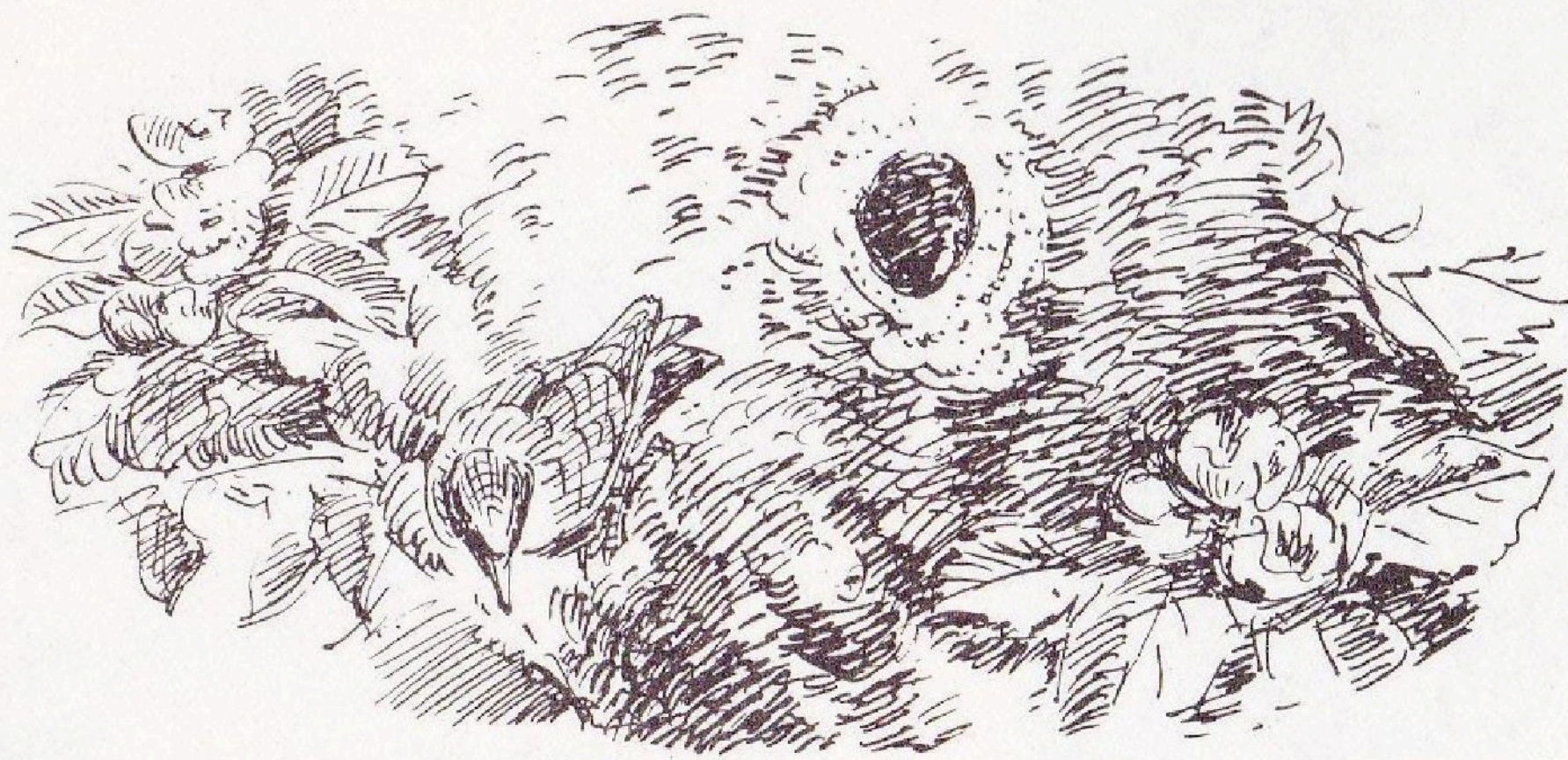
The Nuthatch

The Nuthatch is a plump, little bird, shaped rather like a Woodpecker, with a very short tail and long pointed beak. It likes woodlands and parks with plenty of old trees, but is quite common in gardens, too.

The Nuthatch nests in the holes of trees, but will also use nest-boxes. It always makes the entrance hole smaller by plastering it with hard mud.

Nuthatches will come to bird tables in gardens and soon become quite tame. In the summer they kill enormous numbers of insects and caterpillars, and in winter they eat nuts and acorns, but do no damage in gardens.

If you hear a lovely, cheery whistle in your garden, it is probably made by a Nuthatch.



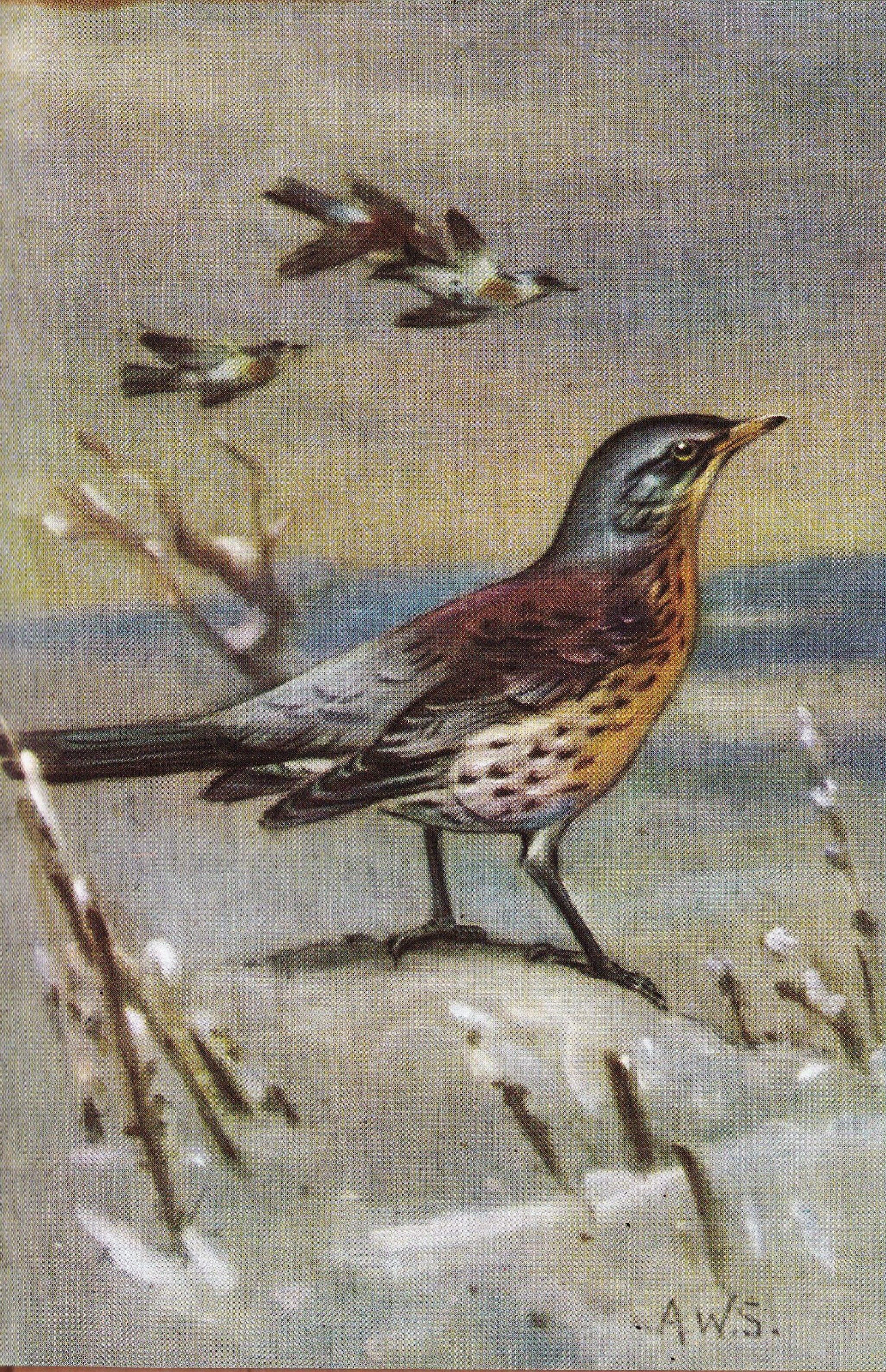


The Fieldfare

Unlike the migrant birds I have mentioned so far, the Fieldfare comes to England for the winter and goes away to the north for the summer, but does not nest anywhere in the British Isles.

The Fieldfare is a Thrush and, when you see it in the fields in winter, it looks like a big, blue-grey Mistle Thrush.

Fieldfares live in large flocks and are very noisy, which makes them easy to see and hear, but difficult to get close to because they are very shy and wary. Fieldfares are fond of berries and also eat a great many insects, snails and slugs. In a very hard winter, they sometimes attack the farmers' swedes, but Fieldfares do much more good than harm on the farms.



A.W.S.

The Pheasant

The Pheasant was probably brought to England by the Romans, but did not have a white ring on its neck like the bird in the picture has, for this came with much later introductions from China. Now almost every English Pheasant has some white on its neck.

Pheasants like cultivated lands near thick woods, where they eat a great deal of grain and also destroy many insects. They are very common birds and are shot for food.

Though Pheasants are often hatched under ordinary farmyard hens and fed by hand, they are shy, wild birds, and are very difficult to approach closely.

The nest is on the ground and a Pheasant may lay as many as fifteen eggs in it.



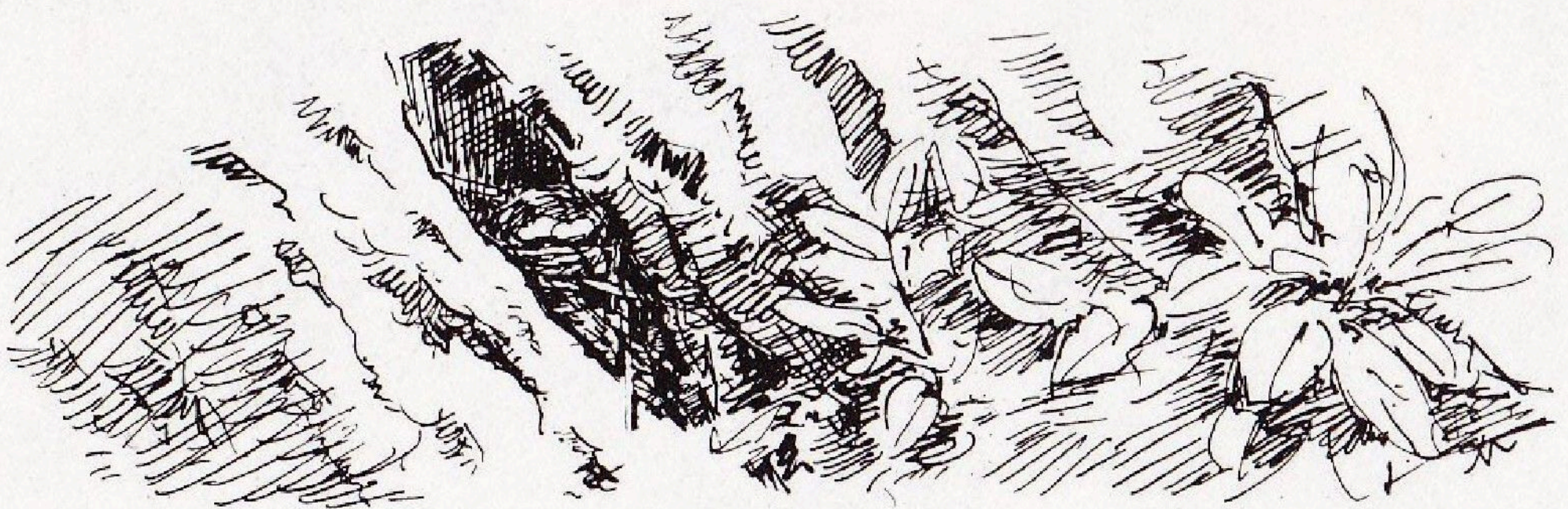


The Tree-Creeper

The Tree-Creeper is a little bird with a long, curved beak and quite a long tail. If you ever see a bird running up the trunk of a tree like a mouse, then that is a Tree-Creeper. It runs up a tree and even along the underside of a branch, but seldom runs down.

When the Tree-Creeper finishes hunting for insects on one tree, it flies to the foot of another, and starts all over again. It likes well-wooded country and old gardens.

The nest is usually placed behind the loose bark of a tree trunk and is made of twigs, moss and grass, lined with feathers. The first eggs are laid at the end of April and often a second family is reared later in the summer.





A. M. S.

The Great Spotted Woodpecker

Though its name gives the impression it is a big bird, the Great Spotted Woodpecker is not quite so big as a Blackbird. It got this name to distinguish it from the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, which is about the size of a Sparrow.

This handsome bird lives on the edges of woods, in orchards and large gardens. It nests in the hole of a tree, usually quite high from the ground. This is the bird that “*drums*” by hitting a dead branch very rapidly with its beak, a sound which can be heard half-a-mile away on a still day.

Its food is nearly all insects harmful to trees, so the Great Spotted Woodpecker is a very useful bird, although it will sometimes eat the eggs of the other birds.





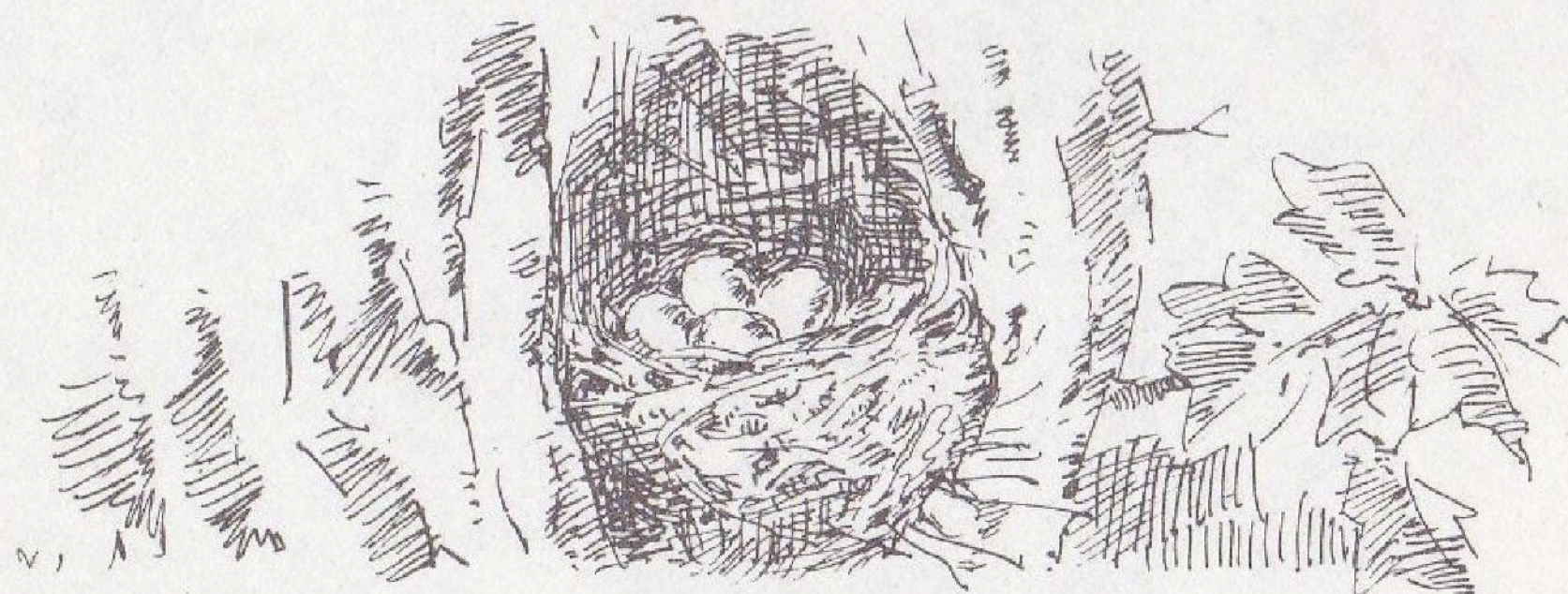
A. N. S.

The Spotted Flycatcher

The Spotted Flycatcher is another bird that comes to us for the summer. It likes gardens and woods, so long as the trees are not too thick.

You can never mistake the Spotted Flycatcher for any other bird. It sits on a fence or branch, or the netting round a tennis court, and then jumps into the air and catches insects with a snap you can hear some yards away. It eats practically nothing but insects.

The nest is usually built against a wall, but sometimes in a hole. It is built of moss and hair, bound together with cobwebs. Spotted Flycatchers will come back to the same spot year after year. The eggs are laid towards the end of May and there is usually only one family each summer.





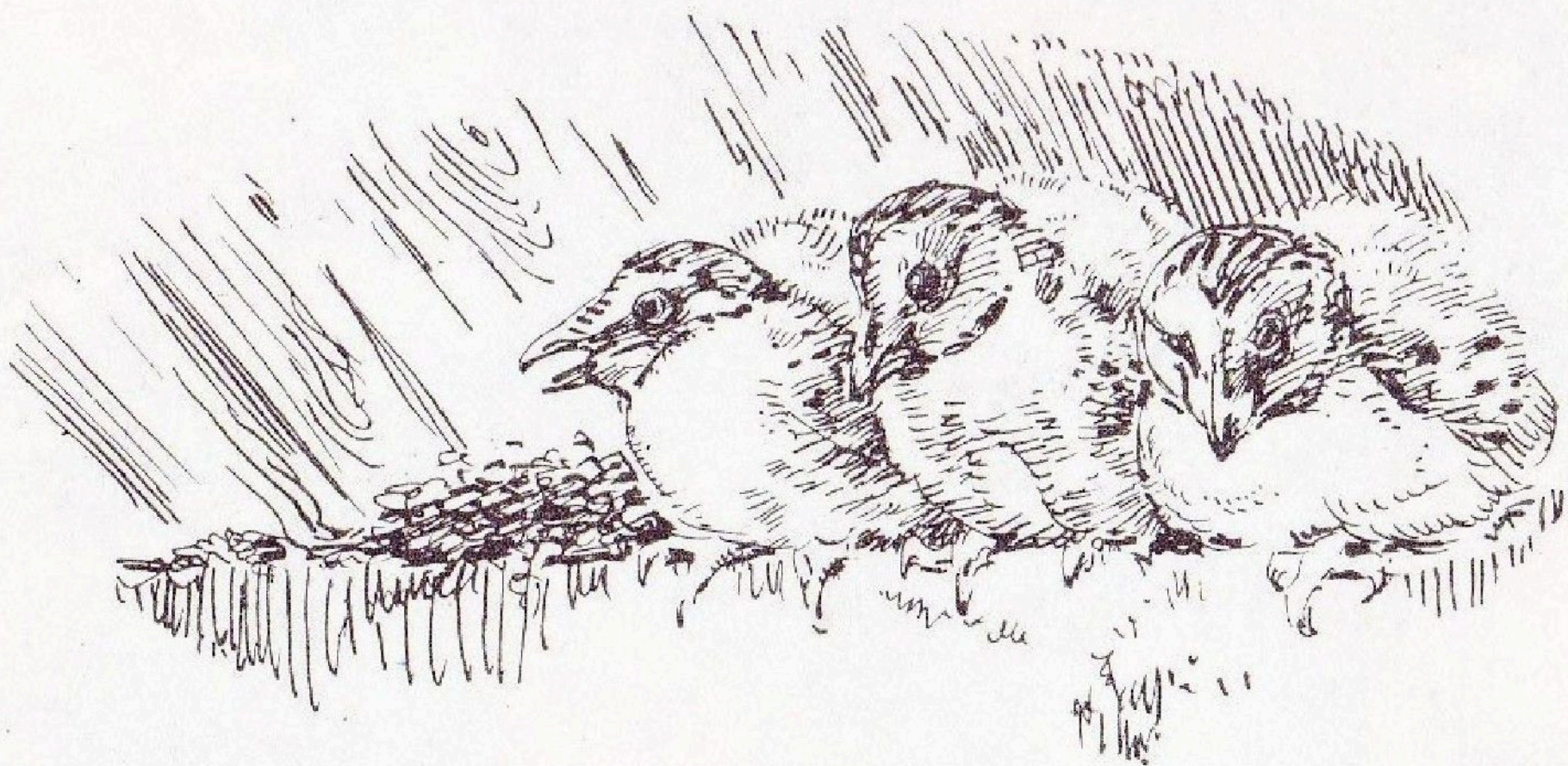
A.W.S.

The Barn Owl

This is the bird that you sometimes see flying in the dusk, silently and close to the ground, and looking rather ghostly. It lives mostly near farms and old buildings, or even right in the middle of towns. Its voice is an unearthly shriek and because of this it is sometimes called "The Screech Owl."

The Barn Owl does not make a nest, but just lays its eggs in a hole of a tree or building. It is a friend of man, for it kills a great many rats and mice, and sometimes late on winter afternoons you can watch it quartering a field and pouncing down on its prey. It eats some small birds, too, catching them while they are asleep.

No one should ever kill Owls, they are much too useful.





The Turnstone

The Turnstone comes to England for the winter, and to see one you must go down to the seashore. It is a little bird about the size of a Blackbird, but is not very easily seen at a distance because it is much the same colour as the shingle or rocks.

This bird derives its name from the habit of turning over stones by giving them a sharp flick with its beak, to catch the insects and shell-fish that live underneath.

On the shore, Turnstones run about very quickly on their twinkling, little legs, and when disturbed fly off only a short distance and then settle again. They live in little flocks and sometimes help each other to turn over a stone too heavy for one bird alone.



The Hawfinch

This very handsome bird is not often seen because it is very shy. It likes to live in old gardens, orchards or woods, and sometimes in old gardens in the middle of towns.

The Hawfinch has a big, heavy beak and a very short tail, and if you do see one you cannot mistake it for any other bird. You can often tell there has been a Hawfinch about by the split cherry stones or torn pea-pods lying beneath the tree where it has been feeding. It is fond of green peas, berries and plums.

The nest is often built on the branch of a fruit tree and is just a shallow platform of twigs lined with hair. There is usually only one family and the eggs are laid in May.



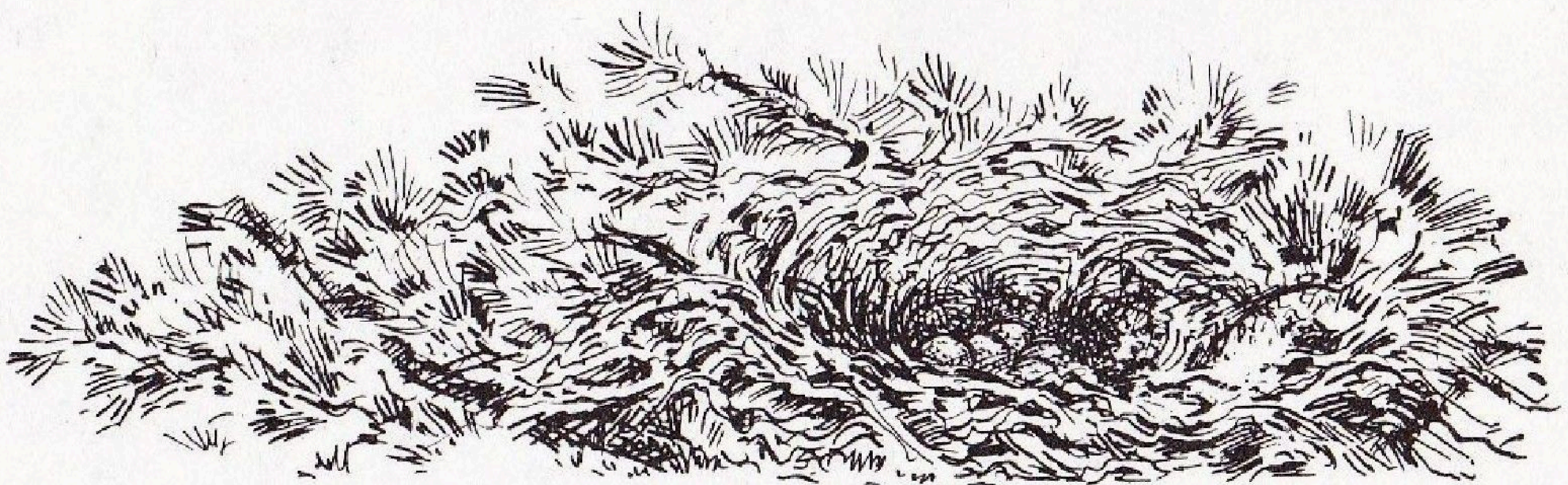


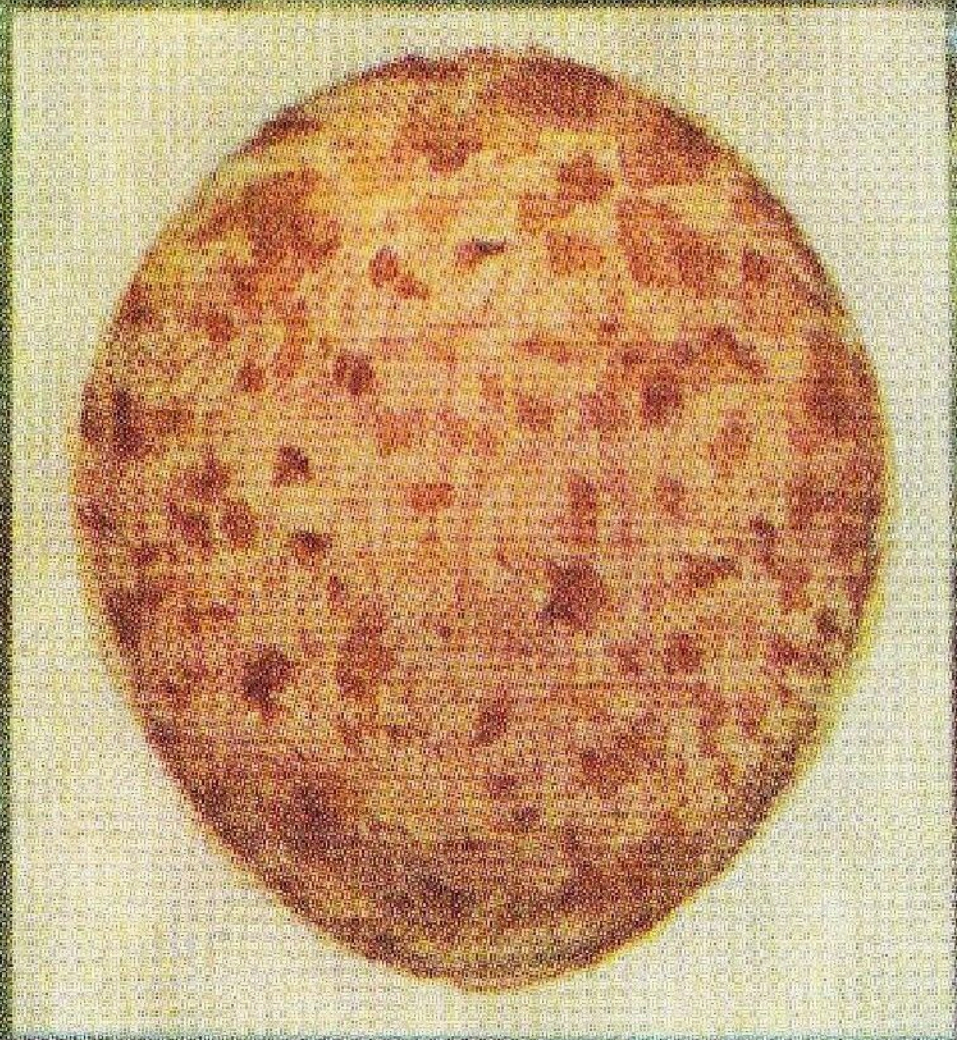
The Kestrel

The Kestrel is a falcon, and this bird is often seen poised motionless in the air, or “hovering” as it is called, while it is looking on the ground below for mice and voles; then it drops like a bullet and seizes its prey in its talons. The Kestrel also kills small birds, but is mostly a hunter of mice, and is very useful to man.

The Kestrel does not make a nest, but uses the old nests of other birds, or just lays its eggs in a hole, on the ledge of a cliff, or in a building, during April, and has only one family a year.

Kestrels often live in towns where there are lots of mice and rats.



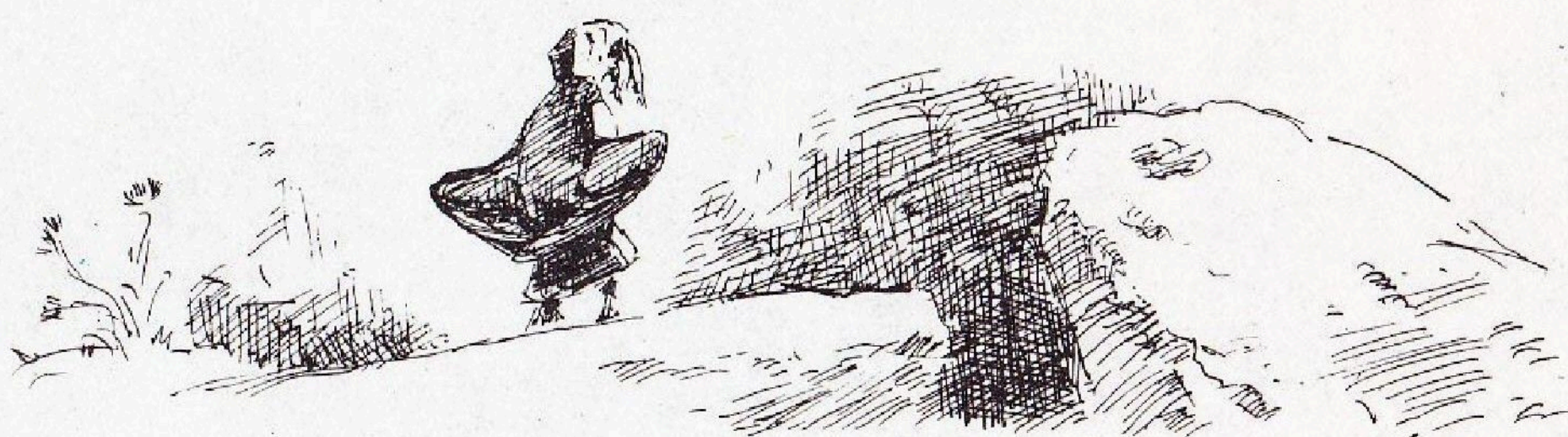


The Puffin

The Puffin is a little bird with a funny face, and a big beak striped like pyjamas. It only comes ashore to nest in March and leaves again in September, spending the rest of the year at sea, sometimes hundreds of miles from land.

Puffins nest in holes they make in the ground, or in rabbit holes, and there are sometimes hundreds of birds in one colony. They live mainly on fish and during the nesting season you can see them flying out to sea and returning to their nests with fish carried crosswise in their beaks, sometimes as many as eight at once.

The Puffin lays only one egg each year and spends much time standing outside its nesting hole looking solemn.



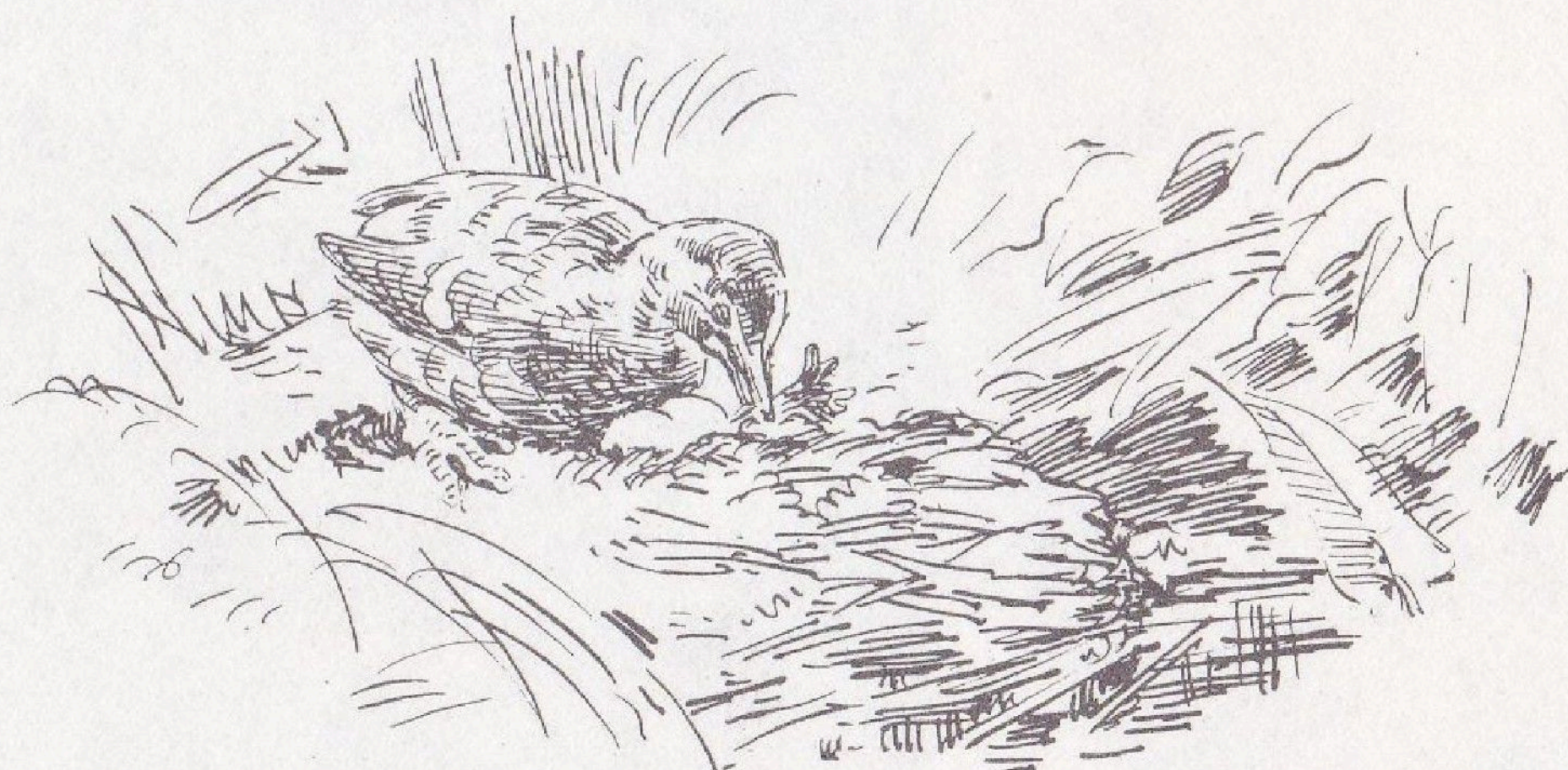


The Little Grebe

The Little Grebe is a water bird and is often called the Dabchick. It likes still water or slow flowing rivers, and can very often be seen on lakes in town parks.

Nesting in the reeds at the water's edge, the Little Grebe builds a heap of water weeds just above the surface of the water and then makes a hollow in the middle for the eggs. When it leaves the nest, it covers them with weeds. There are two families in the year, the first eggs being laid in March.

Little Grebes live on small fish, water insects and water weeds. They catch the fish by diving, staying down for about a quarter-of-a-minute, and sometimes swimming quite a long way under water.





A.W.S.

The Mallard

The Mallard is the common wild duck. Except for being a little smaller, Mallards look and make an ordinary "quack" like farmyard ducks, though the drakes are more splendidly dressed. They will often come to feed in the farmyard.

The Mallard lives on big lakes, field ponds or quiet stretches of rivers, and eats frogs, worms, small fish and leaves of water plants. It usually nests in the reeds at the water's edge, but sometimes builds its nest far away from the water, occasionally in trees or on top of a haystack, and will lay as many as fourteen eggs.

Young Mallards do not like going into water at first and have to be encouraged by their mothers, but as soon as they enter they can swim.





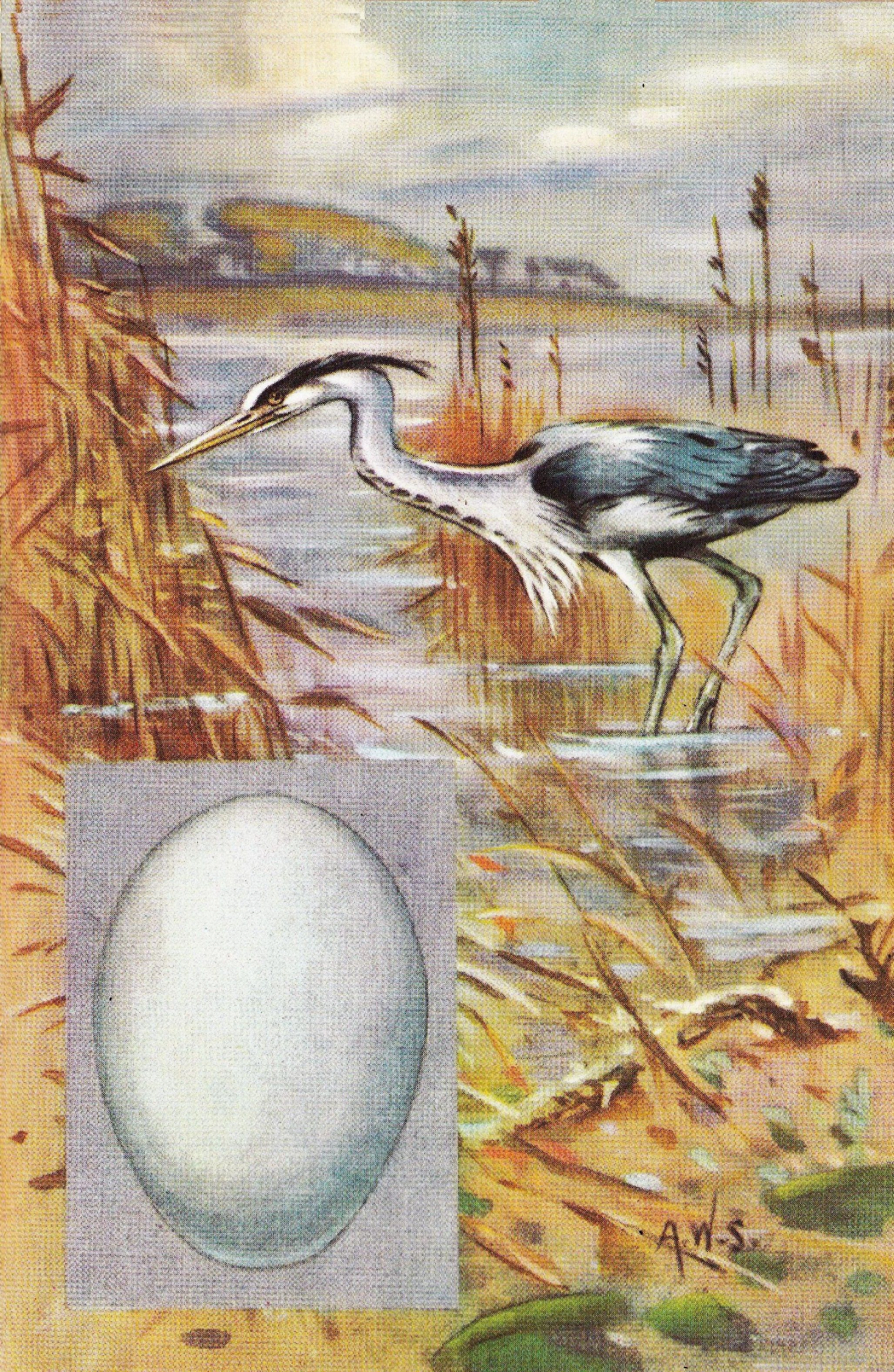
A.W.S.

The Heron

The Heron is a very large bird, over three feet high. It spends most of its time standing quite still at the edge of a pond or river waiting for fish, catching them by a sudden dart of its long, very sharp beak and then swallowing them head first. It also catches mice, voles, frogs and snakes.

Heron build big nests in tall trees and live in colonies called heronries. The same nests are used year after year, but each spring the Herons repair them after the winter gales. The eggs are laid in winter, and when the young birds are in their nest all trying to speak at once, there is a great deal of noise from the heronry.





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***The Birds' Eggs shown in the Coloured Plates
are drawn to actual size.***

***There are also 48 other birds illustrated in
Bird Books 1 and 3***

